

Structural Funds: Commission contributes Euro 3.0 million to a programme of innovative actions for the region of Umbria in Italy.

The European Commission has approved a regional programme of innovative actions called "Umbria@in.action" for the Umbria region. During the period 2002-2003, the EU will provide Euro 3.000 million towards the total cost of the programme which amounts to Euro 6.529 million; the balance will be provided by the public and private sectors in the region, contributing Euro 3.000 million and Euro 0.529 million respectively. The programme aims to test innovative methods and practices for access to information society.

Announcing the decision, Michel Barnier, Member of the Commission responsible for regional policy, said: *"Through the regional programmes of innovative actions we aim to improve the quality of the mainstream programmes of the regional development fund in regions which are lagging behind or suffering from structural change. The actors should view the innovative actions as a laboratory for experimentation in order to find answers for the new challenges in regional development. I am convinced that this programme will strengthen the capacity of innovation in Umbria and contribute positively to its development strategy."*

The Programme aims to establish a coherent policy for accelerating the introduction of information society in the regional system.

It includes the following actions:

- promoting collective access to the Internet, to digital applications and to multimedia resources;
- testing practices in schools;
- setting up common platforms for public and private operators in key sectors of regional economy;
- enhancing and networking the **immaterial assets** existing in the region.

Background

The innovative actions funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aim to create a laboratory for experimentation on regional development in Europe, focusing on actions, which are genuinely innovative. They will be implemented by partnerships in each region comprising the public and private sectors and relevant regional actors.

On this basis, after consultation in the region concerned, the competent authorities in the region are invited to submit an application for a Regional Programme of Innovative Actions to the EU before 31 May each year in the period 2000-05 focusing on one or more of the following three themes:

- Regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation: helping the regions to raise their technological level
- e-EuropeRegio: the information society at the service of regional development

- Regional identity and sustainable development: promoting regional cohesion and competitiveness through an integrated approach to economic, environmental, cultural and social activities.

The total budget available for ERDF innovative actions over the entire period is approximately Euro 400 million. Each successful application receives between Euro 0.3 million and Euro 3 million from the ERDF for a maximum duration of two years. The ERDF co-finances the costs of the programmes of up to 80% in objective 1 regions¹ and up to 50% in objective 2 regions².

The response from the regions in the first year 2001 exceeded expectations: 103 of the 156 eligible regions submitted an application. In addition, 3 specific Network Programmes were also submitted to the Commission. In all, of the 103 applications received, 81 were awarded ERDF co-financing. Of these, 58 were decided before the end of 2001. The Umbria programme is one of the 23 remaining projects which have been approved since January 2002.

Management body

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For more information:

Additional relevant information about innovative actions can be found at the following web site:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/index_en.htm

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¹ Objective 1 of the structural funds: "Development and structural adjustment of regions lagging behind", defined by a GDP per head of below 75% of the EU average.

² Objective 2 of the structural funds: "Supporting the economic and social conversion of areas facing structural difficulties". These are industrial, rural and urban areas or those dependent on fisheries with structural difficulties such as, e.g. a high level of unemployment.